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## The 'highest roade to happiness': the 'Active Philosophy' of James Boevey (1622-1696)

Mark Knights

James Boevey, the relatively unknown merchant philosopher on whom this chapter is focused, knew a lot about 'adversity', 'inconvenience', 'misfortune' and 'troublesome times'.<sup>1</sup> Despite success first as a cashier and then in trade, his life had not been an easy one. As a child apprenticed to a prominent Anglo-Dutch merchant, he had travelled with John Moncy to Middleburg, in the Netherlands, where the latter had died, suddenly, in the house of a man who, Boevey claimed, 'framed Mr. Moncys will, when he was not Compos Mentis, wherein the sayd Peter Boudaen, nomminated himselfe Executor, and incerted a provisoe, in the will, not to be lyable to discouer Mr. Moncys Estate to any Person in the World'.<sup>2</sup> Having married Moncy's niece and co-heir, giving him a legal stake in the rich trader's estate and in the larger profits of the trading Courten Association, Boevey became embroiled in an extraordinarily prolonged series of legal battles, fought out in continental courtrooms, contesting the will and assets. These disputes landed him in prison in 1672

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<sup>1</sup> Commentary on Boevey is confined to Erika Rummel, 'The Educational Thought of James Boevey (1622-95): A Legacy of Erasmian Humanistic Pedagogy', *Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook* xxiii (2003), 84-101; Martin Porter, *Windows of the Soul: The Art of Physiognomy in European Culture 1470-1780* (Oxford, 2005), 164-6; a short biography by Porter for ODNB; E. T. MacDermot, *The History of the Forest of Exmoor* (Taunton, 1911; 1973 reprint); Felix Raab, *The English face of Machiavelli. A Changing Interpretation 1500-1700* (1964), appendix 1. Genealogical information about Boevey can be found in Arthur Crawley-Boevey, *The Perverse Widow or Memorials of the Boevey Family* (1898). Boevey is not mentioned in Daniel Gaber and Michael Ayers (eds.), *Cambridge History of Seventeenth Century Philosophy* ed. (Cambridge, 2008) nor in Peter Anstey (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of British Philosophy in the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 2013). I hope to publish a more extensive treatment of Boevey and his ideas.

<sup>2</sup> George Carew, *To the Honnorable the Knights, Cittizens and Burgesses in Parliament Assembled* (1675), 3-4.

when Boudaen counter-sued 'upon a feigned action' at the Hague, and Boevey's case became part of the rationale for England's third war with the Dutch. Conditions in jail were harsh and he experienced what his business associate called 'sorrows and sufferings'. One of the other men imprisoned at the same time 'died so[o]ne after his releasment of Melancholy humours, contracted in prison, for want of good company, ayre and exercise'.<sup>3</sup> Boevey languished in the Dutch jail for two years – allegedly at the cost of £20,000 because of 'the utter ruin of his credit and trade'.<sup>4</sup> Further legal wrangles ensued, without result. In 1675 it was said that Boevey had lost 'ten thousand pound sterling, besides the loss of his imployment, in trade and Marchandize, whereby he hath impoverished himselfe, and his Family'.<sup>5</sup> As the shifting figures for his losses suggest, there was perhaps an element of exaggeration here, but there is no doubt that he had suffered.

Nor was this all. A seasoned traveller, Boevey faced death on at least three occasions. He once evaded an advancing Imperial army by swimming across the Danube; a second time he escaped a flood in Italy; and the third time, swam ashore after being ship-wrecked.<sup>6</sup> He also experienced the effects of civil war in Britain. Although not directly engaged in fighting, there is evidence to suggest that he acted as a double-agent, helping to supply the parliamentary navy whilst simultaneously assisting the royalist cause.<sup>7</sup> After the restoration of the monarchy, Boevey's son-in-law petitioned the king for the governorship of Newfoundland as a reward, in part, for Boevey's having acted as a royalist agent, 'through

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<sup>3</sup> Brown, *A Brief Narrative* (1680), 24; Carew, *To the Honorable*, 11

<sup>4</sup> *Calendar of Treasury Books, Volume 3: 1669-1672* (1908), 1263

<sup>5</sup> Carew, *To the Honorable*, 4

<sup>6</sup> Clark Library, MS 1960.002, 'The Art of Education', 75. The tale of his travels over the Alps was said by Samuel Pepys, who heard Boevey tell it in a tavern one night, to have been 'very fine' [Pepys Diary for 1668]. Boevey remarked in one of his treatises that 'it is a pleasing thing to his Auditors to hear a Traveller relate his observations & Adventures abroad' ['Art of Education', 105]

<sup>7</sup> Boevey carried confidential letters shortly after the regicide in 1649 between James Howell and the royalist ambassador to the Netherlands, Sir William Boswell [*Epistolæ Ho-Eliaæ, familiar letters domestic and foreign ...by James Howell* (7<sup>th</sup> edition, 1705), iii. 428].

whom most of the King's business passed during his exile, a duty which he fulfilled with integrity and with expense even to ruin.<sup>8</sup> Boevey's investment in Exmoor, which he bought from the crown in 1653, also turned sour after he tried to extract more money from the poor but well-organised men who grazed animals on the common land that he claimed as his own. Another long and bitter series of law suits followed, and although the story that his house was attacked by angry rioters may be apocryphal he certainly stirred up a good deal of resentment.<sup>9</sup> His private life, too, was not trouble-free. Married twice, his son William predeceased him (dying of over-eating, his soul 'borne down by the weight and bulk of his body'<sup>10</sup>) and Boevey began litigation with his daughter-in-law, Catherine, over the ownership of Flaxley Abbey, which Boevey had bought in the 1650s.<sup>11</sup>

Boevey's life, whilst no doubt being dramatic and turbulent, was, of course, far from being entirely unusual. Many others suffered business problems, got caught up in legal disputes or civil war, and had difficult private lives. What marks Boevey out as special and worthy of study is that he left a remarkable series of over thirty manuscript treatises reflecting on his experiences and offering what he called 'active philosophy' as a way of negotiating life's challenges. It was the misfortune and struggles of his life, as much as his reading that informed and shaped Boevey's ideas. He believed he was transmitting 'a Pretious Donative (The Reward of our dear-bought Experience)'.<sup>12</sup> As such, it is the context of his personal

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<sup>8</sup> Memorandum to Sir Leoline Jenkins, 20 June 1681, *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies*, ed. J. W. Fortescue (1898), xi. 65-8. Boevey's daughter Elizabeth married William Hinton, son of Sir William Hinton, a strong royalist and courtier who loaned money to the king and had his estate sequestered by Parliament.

<sup>9</sup> MacDermot, *Exmoor*, chapter xii. Boevey was responsible for 16 suits in the Court of Exchequer between 1654 and 1691 in pursuit of his claims and was clearly capable of inflicting suffering on others as well as being on the receiving end. In a petition to the King against him in 1660, the farmers alleged that he 'had much vexed and troubled' them and in 1685 they claimed that he had designed 'to terrify them' with legal actions.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 74-5.

<sup>11</sup> Crawley-Boevey, *Perverse Widow*, 106.

<sup>12</sup> Clark Library, MS 1960.002, 'The Art of Education', 85,

experiences and socio-economic networks, as much as the influence of other texts or writers, that is key to understanding his works. Boevey thus raises interesting questions about the nature of the 'context' that might help explain works of the past. The methodology advocated by the Cambridge school is primarily to place texts in relation to other texts. Yet whilst it is true that Boevey does refer to other writers (particularly classical author such as Aristotle and Epictetus, but also Hobbes, Machiavelli and other more contemporary continental writers), and that he collected works on alchemy, he was not formally educated in his youth and he disdained bookish approaches to life.<sup>13</sup> His very practical education – he was an accountant for one of the largest mercantile associations in early modern Europe by the time he was 9 years old<sup>14</sup> – as well as his mercantile and then legal career may have helped to convince him that abstract, theoretical philosophy was, on its own, insufficient to achieve the good life: 'For Prudence or Discretion shee gives only the principles, wch will not suffice to give an active life without use & experience'.<sup>15</sup> 'Useful knowledge' was thus not just to be found in books but in 'use & experience'. His philosophy was that of a self-taught, somewhat prickly merchant-turned-lawyer, a representative of a very different socio-economic group to those who are normally the subject of intellectual history. Boevey is unusual: he was a merchant philosopher.

Boevey is distinctive in another way. Apart from one tract, a vindication of Machiavelli (to which he did not put his name), he did not publish any of his treatises, a hesitancy about print culture that is of a piece with his lack of bookish education and also no doubt helps to explain why he has been so little studied. We can, for a number of reasons, assume that Boevey's manuscript strategy was deliberate. We know that he did work in tandem with others to publish material, as when seeking to put his side of the case in his legal battle with

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<sup>13</sup> Boevey only enrolled at the Inner Temple on 10 June 1660, when he was 38, and was not formally called to the bar.

<sup>14</sup> Between the age of 9 and 15 Boevey 'did write the accounts' of the company's trade in England [Geroge Carew, *Fraud and Oppression Detected and Arraigned* (1676), 16].

<sup>15</sup> Wellcome Library, MS 699, 'Of Discerning of Men', tab 23.

Boudaen and others, so he clearly did use print when he thought it advantageous to do so.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, he clearly intended his treatises to be read. He cross-referenced his works so that readers could move from one title to another; and he explicitly stated that he intended his philosophy to have a practical application by others.

It thus appears that his 'active philosophy' was intended for manuscript circulation within a fairly tight intellectual network. We know that he was on close terms with John Aubrey who read the treatises, noted their titles and their utility, and recommended that Boevey deposit them with the Royal Society.<sup>17</sup> Boevey also knew royalist churchman Thomas Fuller, who dedicated one of the sections of his 'Church History' to him;<sup>18</sup> and the royalist courtier and philosopher Sir Kenelm Digby, who thought his friend was 'borne for an vniuersall good' and praised his 'excellent Conversation'.<sup>19</sup> Boevey's ideas on trade also circulated and became public: according to Aubrey he 'made it his businesse to advance the Trade of England and many men have printed his Conceptions', an allusion perhaps to the many works published by his associate George Carew who argued that England was capable of usurping Dutch commercial supremacy.<sup>20</sup> It seems likely, therefore, that Boevey's intended readers were his family, friends and close intellectual circle. That his works were in manuscript circulation is suggested by the fact that four of his treatises found their way into the private collection of the Cowper family, perhaps because the free-thinking Hertfordshire Whigs were fascinated

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<sup>16</sup> Carew referred to the 'the severall actions and pleadings being printed at large in *French and Dutch* by Mr. *Iames Boeve* and my self' and referred to 'Boeve's printed Vindication.' [Carew, *Fraud and Oppression*, dedication to the Lord Mayor of London, and 3]

<sup>17</sup> *Brief Lives, Chiefly of Contemporaries, set down by John Aubrey* ed. Andrew Clark (Oxford, 1898), 115

<sup>18</sup> Fuller, *The Church-history of Britain* (1655), 119.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Pugh, *Blacklo's Cabal* (1680), 100-2. For a discussion of Digby's philosophy see John Henry, 'Sir Kenelm Digby, Recusant Philosopher' in G.A.J. Rogers, Tom Sorell and Jill Kraye (eds.), *Insiders and Outsiders in Seventeenth Century Philosophy* (Abingdon, 2010).

<sup>20</sup> *Brief Lives*, ed. Clark, 115. In 1676 Carew was agitating for a fourth Dutch war [Carew, *Fraud and Oppression*, dedication to parliament (section 3, before p.65)]

by his deism, and a copy of his work on Machiavelli was among the papers collected by Robert Harley, suggesting that it too may have been in wider networks of circulation.<sup>21</sup>

The process of revision of his treatises, in which he seems to have been engaged in the 1690s,<sup>22</sup> may also offer a further clue about why he chose not to publish. Active philosophy required a constant, never-ending process of evaluating experience:

it requires the study and Industrie of more then one man's life and experience; and [the reader] will the rather excuse what wee have omitted when hee shall consider that to finde all the subtile practices and devises necessary to be handled in Active Philosophy will require the expense and experience of many Ages and admit of new Editions as long as the world shall last.<sup>23</sup>

Boevey's work could thus never find closure - it would have 'new Editions as long as the world shall last' – whereas print, as Elizabeth Eisenstein famously argued, fixed things. As an on-going process of self-reflection, 'active philosophy; had another intended reader: Boevey himself. His urge to write down his thoughts for his own use appears to have been apparent very early, in his teens, perhaps a result of the accounting mentality that he was learning at the same time. From the age of 14 'he had a candle burning by him all night, with pen, inke and paper to write downe thoughts as they came into his head'.<sup>24</sup> Boevey's philosophy was thus bound up with the desire to record his own thoughts.

Boevey's work has a further relevance to the themes of this volume. Not only did satisfaction lie in the process of writing but he also considered the topic of 'felicity' as part of his philosophy. He wrote a treatise with that theme as its title; it is now lost but enough hints remain in the rest of his writings to suggest what he might have argued in it. Boevey

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<sup>21</sup> Published in *The Harleian Miscellany*, x. (1810) 183-7. In 1656 the work also appeared in a plagiarised and amended form in Francis Osborne's *A Discourse Upon Nicholas Machiavell*.

<sup>22</sup> The manuscripts in the Cowper papers (see below) have dates in the 1690s.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p.231

<sup>24</sup> *Brief Lives*, ed. Clark, 113. A portrait of him aged 11 or 12 shows him pointing to a book containing writing [Crawley-Boevey, *The Perverse Widow*, plate opposite p. 36]

believed that his entire active philosophy was a means to 'felicity' or – he used both words – 'happiness'. He advised his imagined reader:

above all things, in order to his happiness in this world, get to be thoroughly Instructed in Active Philosophie; for this it is, that in very deed & truth, is ye Art of Arts; It instructs to good manners and leads by ye hand to Prudence and Wisdome, and to ye use of Arts & things; And he that is good at it, is in ye highest roade to Happiness; It is ye very Quintessence of deare bought Experience; It is ye truest dialect of ye World with which, he will be able to travell farther & more securely then with all ye learning in Europe.<sup>25</sup>

Boevey's philosophy, a reflection on his turbulent life, admitted the presence of 'fortune' and misfortune: 'happiness' lay in meeting and navigating its challenges as well as the proper contemplation of life's vicissitudes. As befitted an admirer of Epictetus, Boevey admired stoic virtues. Active Philosophy taught a man to 'become master both of himself & others also; It will teach him to doe all things, as it were, by Lyne and Levell, keep him free from Passions or Perturbations of ye minde; for ye soul is bemisted & benighted when ye Passions are in any heighth'.<sup>26</sup> Active Philosophy, therefore, aimed to distil lived experience, thereby advancing philosophy beyond the errors of scholasticism; and it offered prudence, wisdom, and patience through a thoroughly rational curtailment of the passions and an understanding or even mastery both of the self and others.

Boevey also believed that activity led to its own form of happiness. Men should not be 'faint, lazy or negligent but active and painful; to remove all difficulties and rubbs that oppose us in our way to happiness'.<sup>27</sup> He believed that 'Man is by nature active and hee must be doing'. Indeed, there were many things that could be done to enhance the chances of a good life. 'A dejected minde for want of success in business is best remedied by Active Philosophie wch teacheth a man to get what he would, and to transact all the affairs of life easily, dexterously, safely & with credit'.<sup>28</sup> A man had to work at life: 'Let him then labour by

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<sup>25</sup> Clark Library, MS 1960.002, 'The Art of Education', 89.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 93.

<sup>27</sup> Clark Library, MS 1960.005, 'The Art of Moderating Desire', 11,

<sup>28</sup> Clark Library, MS 1960.006, 'The Art of Moderating Grief', 192.



meditation, counsell and rules sett down in Active Philosohpie to get him a prudent minde, a stout brawny spirit, and shew himselfe a wise man in his course'. A man had actively to help himself: he must 'make the world his library and learne to reade men as well as Bookes ... Every Man sitts at the Anvile and Forge of his own Fortune-making ...It is self-industrie [that] must perfect all'.<sup>29</sup> His belief in prudent calculation and negotiation, in understanding what motivated others and oneself, in mastering the emotions and in self-industry offers an intriguing insight into the mindset of a member of the improving classes that Paul Slack's work has done so much more to illuminate.

Boevey was a self-improver but also someone who thought that his philosophy would lead to more material improvement. In 1692 he teasingly donated a volume to the scholars of Oxford called 'Boevey's Tables of the Philosophers Stone'.<sup>30</sup> It purported to contain 'The Secret Algebraick Key to Treasure' and although he promised to unlock it, he never explained it before his death. The book must have seemed curious to anyone that opened it, for it contained nothing but 24 pages of numbers arranged in tables – probably sets of exchange rates. On the inside back cover Boevey explained that it had never been out of his possession and that he gave it to the university 'for their & his Countries Good; to the Intent, that they might not be Inferior to any of their Neighbour Nations, in Science, Industry & Treasure'. Active Philosophy thus advanced the public good. Boasting that it was a 'Singular' work unknown to any of the libraries of Europe he added: 'What success this Key will have; I leave to the Censure of the Learned in the Faculty of getting Treasure, who can only truly make the further Keyes; and give a Judgment of it. Gentlemen I am your humble servant James Boevey. My Good countrymen, thus you may see how I dare to love you, even with the Hazard of my Reputation'. We can return to the secrets and significance of the volume in a moment; first, we must establish what reputation, apparently lost today, he had to hazard and to sketch out the range of his interests as seen through his writing.

The range and themes of Boevey's work

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<sup>29</sup> Clark Library, MS 1960.002, 'The Art of Education', 85.

<sup>30</sup> Bodleian Library, MS 947.

According to his friend John Aubrey, Boevey was a 'person of great temperance and deepe thoughts, and a working head, never idle'. From about 1664-6 he 'wrote Active Philosophy (a thing not donne before) wherein are enumerated all the Arts and Tricks practised in Negotiation, and how they were to be ballanced by counter-prudentiall Rules'.<sup>31</sup> Aubrey, who had seen and read many of the treatises, listed them. The impressively wide array of topics that he covered included education, conversation, 'government of the tongue' and pen, the 'government' of reputation and power, servants, friendship, enmity, lawsuits, the art of gaining wealth and of commerce, secrecy, marital love and desire, felicity, the diseases and cures of the mind, the art of discerning men, rational religion, and the art of moderating desire and grief. In addition he wrote lives of Confucius, Mohammed, Atticus, Sejanus and Augustus, together with a vindication of Machiavelli. The range of subjects offered a comprehensive system of thought covering personal, social, cultural, economic, legal and political issues.

Twenty two of Boevey's distinctive small, signed, leather-bound notebooks survive, enough to piece together significant elements of his 'Active Philosophy' which was conceived of as an interconnected, systemic work.<sup>32</sup> Although we lack the introductory volume, something of Boevey's aims and objectives can be gleaned from the surviving manuscripts. He believed he was making an important contribution because philosophy as a whole was both neglected and, as currently written, not very useful:

The truth is, philosophy being reputed as unfit for civil business & no preform[en]ts attending ye skill thereof, men of ye finer temper & of ye more excellent wits, aiming at credit & promotion in ye world, passe by philosophy as a fruitless barren study, & betake themselves to law, Physick &c But undoubtedly a good Phylosopher after a

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<sup>31</sup> *Brief Lives* ed. Clark, 112. 'The Government of Enmities' is dated 1665; 'The Art of Moderating Desire' is dated 1666.

<sup>32</sup> Clark Library, MS 1960.006, 'The Second Tome of Greife', 231. The manuscripts have been dispersed across archives in the UK and North America. I hope to publish a fuller examination of these elsewhere.

small practice abroad will be ye fittest man of all for civil businesse; having ye advantage of all his good notions & of his universal rules well settled in his minde.<sup>33</sup>

Boevey's highly innovative intention was thus to fit philosophy for 'civil businesse', to create a practical, 'useful knowledge'.<sup>34</sup> His stress throughout was on practical applications rather than scholarly debate. Thus although he thought 'the ancients' were very useful, they had important limitations:

they extoll vertue highly and would seem to make it appeare beyond ye estimate of all things in ye world; but they do not sufficiently instruct a man how he shall know it, ye steps by w[hi]ch he shall attain it.<sup>35</sup>

His own philosophical treatises, drawing on his own experiences as much as on his reading, were by contrast designed to be practical, instructive lessons: 'The Rules and Considerations which we have deliver'd through out our Active Philosophy may serve a man not only in such distresses and miseries as may befall him, to winde them about to his owne benefit, or beare them with a quiet minde; but in prosperity alsoe, that they may keep him within compass'.<sup>36</sup> His philosophy actively supported men in times of 'distresses' but also curbed their excesses in times of 'prosperity'.

It is relatively rare to be able to penetrate the philosophical outlooks of merchants of this period beyond their economic ideas and political, social or religious networks. Ground-breaking work by Robert Brenner, for example, which collects a mass of prosopographical evidence, has relatively little to say about merchants' philosophical speculations for the period of Boevey's early commercial activity; and Perry Gauci's work on merchants in the Restoration era similarly gives us valuable insights into the life of traders but does not explore their philosophies except in so far as politics and religion indicated ideological

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<sup>33</sup> Wellcome Library, MS 699, 'Of Discerning of Men', tab 22.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, tab 145.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, tab 91.

<sup>36</sup> Clark Library, MS 1960.006 'The Art of Moderating Grief', 249.

allegiances.<sup>37</sup> Although perhaps idiosyncratic, Boevey's writings enable us to explore the mind of a merchant philosopher in a much more rounded way, across a wider spectrum of subjects, than is possible for many of his contemporaries. Moreover, it is probable that his 'active philosophy' was particularly suited to his commercial background: the stress on prudential calculation of other people's inner intentions reflected a mercantile desire to expose the intentions of others whilst keeping one's own wants and weaknesses hidden, an art of 'discerning' others that he believed would yield constant advantages over them. But that advantage also rested on other knowledge too. The rest of this chapter will explore the range of Boevey's interests, showing that he wrote on an incredibly wide range of subjects, evidence of an early Enlightenment enthusiasm for an all-inclusive philosophy. It is also striking that throughout his writings Boevey displayed a strong interest in the psychology of man, seeking to understand how mind and body interacted and how one could study behaviour.

What, then, were the main ideas explored in Boevey's works? A number of themes emerge: the uncertainties of life, the pursuit by others of their own interests, the dissimulations and

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<sup>37</sup> Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict and London's Overseas Traders 1550-1653* (Cambridge, 1993); Perry Gauci, *The Overseas Merchant in State and Society 1660-1720* (Oxford, 2001); Gauci, *Emporium of the World: The Merchants of London 1660-1800* (London, 2007). Ted McCormick, *William Petty and the Ambitions of Political Arithmetic* (Oxford, 2009) and Tom Leng, *Benjamin Worsley (1618-1677); Trade, Interest and the Spirit of Revolutionary England* (Woodbridge, 2008) shed light on the intellectual discussions stimulated by issues of trade. The role of trade and the economy in the Hartlib circle is also a useful context: see, for example, Charles Webster, *Samuel Hartlib and the Advancement of Learning* (Cambridge, 1970); Mark Greengrass, Michael Leslie and Timothy Raylor, *Samuel Hartlib and the Universal Reformation* (Cambridge, 1994); Carl Wennerlind, 'Hartlibian Political Economy and the New Culture of Credit' in Philip Stern and Wennerlind (eds.), *Mercantilism Reimagined: Political Economy in Early Modern Britain and its Empire* (Oxford, 2013). For insights into the mind of an eighteenth century clothier see Matthew Kadane, *The Watchful Clothier: The Life of an Eighteenth-Century Protestant Capitalist* (New Haven, 2013).

deceptions they practiced, and the need to penetrate those hidden designs. These contexts required a philosophy that gave men practical mastery over themselves and over others through a deep understanding of how human nature worked, physiologically, psychologically and philosophically.

Boevey did not believe in conventional religion. His outlook was not, unlike so many of his commercial contemporaries, derived from Protestantism (he is a far cry from the Puritan improvers in the Hartlib circle) or even orthodox Christianity.<sup>38</sup> To be sure, he was brought up in the Dutch church in which his father was an active member and he himself seems initially to have subscribed to its tenets.<sup>39</sup> But at some point – we cannot be sure exactly when<sup>40</sup> – he became so disillusioned with ‘priestcraft’ that he wrote deist tracts attacking the clergy and outlining a very different form of deist belief and practice. Thus whilst in some ways Boevey might seem the rational, prudent, modern Weberian merchant, he does not seem to have been motivated by protestant ethics at all but rather by a newer, more speculative set of beliefs that were nevertheless equally important for the advance of mercantile society. He was a self-proclaimed ‘citizen of the world’, a phrase more redolent of David Hancock’s eighteenth century merchants than the seventeenth.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> See works cited in note 37.

<sup>39</sup> Andreas Boevey was an elder of the Dutch church at Austin Friars in London where the young James also worshipped. In 1648 James also subscribed to a collection made by the London Dutch community for their compatriots besieged by Parliamentary forces at Colchester. As Huguenots, the family had fled to England in the 1570s after the invasion of the Low Countries by the Duke of Alva [Crawley-Boevey, *The Perverse Widow*, 1-6, 25].

<sup>40</sup> The deist tracts are dated in the early 1690s but Aubrey mentions them as part of the philosophy in his listing of 1680.

<sup>41</sup> Clark Library, MS 1960.006, ‘The Art of Moderating Grief’, 149; David Hancock, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community 1735-85* (Cambridge, 1997). Seventeenth-century merchants did, however, have an increasingly global outlook, as Courten, Boevey’s patron, illustrates: see *A Brief Narrative and Deduction*

Boevey's active philosophy rejected Christian conventions, and indeed all organised religion, as unnecessary to salvation.<sup>42</sup> In four tracts setting out his ideas, Boevey was scathing about the major religions of the world, including Christianity.<sup>43</sup> He thought that all 'revealed' religions were crafty impositions by the clergy on a superstitious people: 'the founders of all religions wheedled the credulous croud into a belief of a familiarity with some God; thus did Numa impose upon the Romans, Mahomet on the Arabians & Moses on the Jewes'.<sup>44</sup> Revelations and miracles were frauds and unnecessary to man's happiness. Boevey poured scorn on the clergy who epitomised the deceivers and deluders from whom active philosophy sought to free mankind: they 'impose upon religion and upon deluded mankind'.<sup>45</sup> Conventional religion was priestcraft, he argued, a matter of politics not belief. Idolatry was used by princes to breed a sense of veneration of them as divine, and priests helped princes to do this through mass deception. Priests were 'the wickedest and craftiest of men' who 'soon discovered their own interest in being contributors to' the despotic designs of secular powers.<sup>46</sup> Priestcraft deceived by tricks and stratagems. The solution was for men to reason for themselves: 'the reason why a man bred in bigottism continues in it is

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*of the Several Remarkable Cases of Sir William Courten* (1679) for his interests in the East Indies, Japan, China, Europe, Africa and America. Boevey is mentioned on page 6.

<sup>42</sup> He was married in the Dutch church in 1653 [Crawley-Boevey, *Perverse Widow*, 25]. The date of his desertion of his Calvinistic faith is unknown, though three of his deist tracts were written by 1680 when Aubrey saw them.

<sup>43</sup> For a longer discussion of Boevey's religious ideas and their collection by the Cowper family see Knights, *The Devil in Disguise. Deception, Delusion and Fanaticism in the Early English Enlightenment* (Oxford, 2011), 103-7. For the wider context of 'priestcraft', and the influence of stoicism, see Justin Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: The Church of England and its Enemies 1660-1730* (Cambridge, 1992); Champion, 'Religion's Safe, with Priestcraft is the War': Augustan Anticlericalism and the Legacy of the English Revolution, 1660-1720', *The European Legacy*, v (2000), 547-561.

<sup>44</sup> Hertfordshire Archive and Local Studies, D/EP F47-2, f.44.

<sup>45</sup> Hertfordshire Archive and Local Studies, D/EP F47-3, f.18.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, f.16.

that he is scarce master of his own thoughts and cannot open his eyes to see things in a new light other than that in which he has been accustomed to see them'.<sup>47</sup> Mastering one's self and penetrating the designs of others in religion was thus entirely of a piece with the other elements of active philosophy.

Boevey was a stoical deist. In a rare piece of name-checking, Boevey invoked the ideals of the Greek Stoic Epictetus, for whom suffering was the result of trying to control what was uncontrollable.<sup>48</sup> Man had to accept that 'changes & vicissitudes of humane affairs' were inevitable and in some sense even desirable. What seemed to us to be hurtful was really for 'the good of the universe' and 'these publique evils exercise the good, instruct and form them to virtue, constancie, valour, to the victorie over the world and fortune'. Indeed, he suggested, 'they are the wholesome, necessarie effects of divine justice, tokens of God's care and love and providence'. The 'harmony of the world is made up of discordant notes', he claimed, designed by the 'supreme providence' to consist of competing contrarities.<sup>49</sup> This notion of the harmony of discordance helps to explain some of the ambiguities in his thought, for the pursuit of self-interest which he both condemned and condoned was part of the discordance that was paradoxically essential to greater harmony. Clearly Boevey believed that misfortune could be a positive force: 'The rude and barbarous are thereby polish'd & refin'd; Arts & sciences are dispersed & imparted to all. This is a great Nursery, wherein some trees are transplanted from other stocks; others prun'd or rooted up; all of the good and beautie of the orchard. Know that what seemes hurtfull to us is for the good

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<sup>47</sup> Hertfordshire Archive and Local Studies, DE/P/F47/4, f.142.

<sup>48</sup> Clark Library, MS 1960.006, 'Moderating Griefe', 5-7. Similarities between Boevey's ideas and those of Epictetus are clear: both believed in the importance of self-knowledge and self-control; that desires degrade us; that good is to be desired and evil avoided; that every individual is connected to others, each with a part to play, within a harmonious universe. Boevey also borrowed from Epictetus the conviction that men were unhappy because they mistakenly followed the opinions of others, pursuing imaginary rather than real goods [Theodore Scaltsas and Andrew S. Mason (eds.), *The Philosophy of Epictetus* (Oxford, 2007); A. A. Long, *Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life* (Oxford, 2002)]

<sup>49</sup> Clark Library, MS 1960.006, 'Moderating Griefe', 133.

of the universe'.<sup>50</sup> Active philosophy thus taught men to minimise misfortune; once that lesson was learned, a man was 'past gun-shott'.<sup>51</sup> This recognition stood popular wisdom on its head. 'The vulgar are of opinion that the good things of fortune and of the body are to be preferred before those of the minde', that idleness was better than labour, and that a multitude of friends was better than 'a paucity'; but these popular opinions were wrong.<sup>52</sup> True wisdom lay in accepting that misfortune was part of life but also, thereby escaping fatalism, that activity could help make the best of a bad job.

Men could help themselves by focusing on understanding human nature. This meant being suspicious about other people. His tract on 'Suspicion' opens with a token warning against being over-suspicious but then proceeds to urge against trusting others: 'Men put on so many disguises that they may the better deceive, that who believes them easily is drawn to be abused'.<sup>53</sup> Boevey's deep suspicions about other people's characters and motives also become clear in an A-Z of those to be guarded against, from the 'ambitious' to the 'wicked'.<sup>54</sup> Although he thought that the relationship between master and servant was 'for their mutuall advantage' he advised neither side to trust the other. The good master thus constantly kept his servants under surveillance: every look and word was to be weighed and the master should 'trust none too farr'.<sup>55</sup> Servants were potentially valuable but they needed very careful handling. A master had to show skill and authority when disciplining them. Boevey proudly gave an illustration of this from his own experience, recounting how in November 1665 he had told a maidservant whom he suspected of stealing his son's diamond-encrusted ring 'that he perused his Bookes of Astrology and that thereby he found

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 25-7.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 231.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 233.

<sup>53</sup> The Northwestern University Library, MS 'Of Serviency', 116.

<sup>54</sup> Referring to what is most likely to have been the lost volumes of 'Characters', Boevey refers readers to 'the Art of knowing Mens Vices at large, where, by the Alphabet, he may find more under the same head, or by that which hast affinity to it, a fuller Character' ['Of Serviency', 10].

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 29, 39.



for certain that she & non else was the Thiefe; And while he was relating these & such like discourses to her, he perceived her to sweate and her colour to come & goe, like one that was in a great Agony'. Whilst she was distracted he caused for a search to be made, thereby recovering the ring.<sup>56</sup>

Equally, however, no one could trust the word of the powerful:

Let him not trust to the Vowes, oaths or protestations of Great men, all which upon a true survey signifieth nothing of utilitie, at best more danger than profit, they binding onely such as in relation to Impotency or honesty stand in least need of them & become like Jugglers knots, no ways more restrictive to the potent Engine then they please themselves, who are able to Elude them by Sleights, or break them by power, as is witnessed by fresh Instances.<sup>57</sup>

Boevey, perhaps reflecting on his own experience here and in what followed, described the role of employed agent, recommending such men should be careful, cautious, and secretive: 'Let him make it his main worke to discover others manners & hide his owne'.<sup>58</sup> The agent should even 'doe violence to himself rather than not dissemble & conceale the Injuries done him by his prince or patron'.<sup>59</sup> Such dissembling even dictated that an agent should follow 'to a haire' the corrupt humours of his masters into drunkenness and lust.<sup>60</sup>

Boevey's inclination to distrust everyone and desire successfully to see through and negotiate their duplicity (even by practising one's own deceptions) emerges again in his treatise on enmities and discord, something of course in which he was a bit of an expert.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 60-62.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 98.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 111.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 77.

<sup>61</sup> Enmity was also explored in Clark Library, MS 1960.003, 'The Art of Going to Law'.

Boevey's thoughts on this were ambiguous. He recognised that 'Law is like a game of cards wherein all the players are losers'; yet he also thought that without upholding law, the world descended to 'the worst of slaverie' [1, 3]. Perhaps the most surprising feature of the

Boevey saw enmity as the result of each man selfishly pursuing his own profit: 'The profits and emoluments of this fraile life are the onelie factories and disuniting themes that sett the whole world at odds'.<sup>62</sup> In these circumstances, avoiding conflict was an art, for an enemy could be overcome 'by Industry, by assiduity, by promises, by deceipts'.<sup>63</sup> Such deceptions required stealth, secrecy and dissimulation: 'Tis safer to hide our designs and (as rowers doe) turn our backs on the place wee are going to. The best and surest course is to conceale (if possible) what wee ayme at until it be beyond their power to prevent us'.<sup>64</sup> Discretion thus required dissembling.<sup>65</sup> Enemies should not be confronted, but treated with courtesy and a seeming reconciliation, the better to lull them into a false sense of security and enable an opportunity for revenge or gaining an advantage.<sup>66</sup> 'He that would revenge must feign himself a friend not professe himself an Enimie'.<sup>67</sup> Boevey saw a fundamental tension in the duplicitous and designing world around him: selfish pursuit of profit lay at the heart of all conflict, and yet the arts needed to defend oneself against it were precisely those that furthered one's own selfish pursuit of profit. This was the harmony of discordance.

If dissembling was key to his philosophy, Boevey nevertheless thought it imperative that men should be able to penetrate the designs of others. He therefore wrote two tracts about 'decerning a man's selfe': one about discovering 'his abilities for action' and the other about how to discern a man's true character. Both treatises stressed the need to establish the

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tract is a justification of the corruption of judges and witnesses: what was condemned in the court of heaven was not, apparently, 'heer below' [41]. In his treatise on grief Boevey suggested that law suits taught life skills: 'it is evident in most men that they thence learn how to play their game the better ever after' [Clark Library, MS 1960.006, 131].

<sup>62</sup> Clark Library, MS 1960.008, 'The Government of Enmities', 7.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 61.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 61, 69-73, 121-5.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 131.

subject's bodily 'temper' and to evaluate outward signs that could reveal the inner man.<sup>68</sup> In other words, both the body and the mind offered clues about the inner 'self'. Boevey regarded man as both a natural and artificial being, shaped both by his body's physical constitution (determined by the four humours) and external factors such as climate or types of food as well as 'manners' derived from education, reading and, of course, philosophy. In order to understand a man's true self, Boevey had to construct a physiology of natural dispositions and a psychology of behaviour.<sup>69</sup>

This apparently forward-looking stance arose from a conventional adherence to Galenic theories of the body. Boevey thought that the body might be controlled by the mind because it controlled the all-important animal spirits that influenced behaviour: 'though the motion of the animal spirits proceeding from the temper or from objects be many times very strong, yet may it be master'd in great part or totally chang'd by the mere force of the minde (if it be corroborated by a customary impression of some noted axioms or rules[]]'.<sup>70</sup> Active philosophy helped to provide such axioms and rules, so that mastery of the self was possible:

Now because very many humane actions of cogitation (most thoughts) are attended with the affections of pain or pleasure; hence it comes to pass that almost all the happiness and all the miserys of mans life, lyes in a right or in a wrong ordering & government of his affections; who so, therefore, would leade a happy life, must use his whole endeavour and learn to assuage all sensuall pain of the touch (by physical

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<sup>68</sup> Clark Library MS 1960.001, 'The Art of Decerning a Man's selfe', 1. Boevey refers in Clark Library, MS 1960.002, *Art of Education*, f.85, to his 'four Treatises on the Art of decerning men' but only three appear to have survived, the other two being two volumes of 'The Art of Discerning Men', at Wellcome Library, London MS 699, volume 1; Cambridge University Library, Dd.15.28, volume 2.

<sup>69</sup> Norbert Elias noted that self-observation and observation of others led to a psychological outlook. [*The Civilising Process* trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford, 1994), 475-92]

<sup>70</sup> Clark Library MS 1960.001, 'The Art of Decerning a Man's selfe', 17.

remedies) and to moderate the rest of his affections, by sound judgm[en]t & by the works or character of sound judgment & good affections imprinted in his brain.<sup>71</sup>

Overcoming bodily sensations through sound judgements or rules imprinted on the brain opened the way to a rational philosophy that could offer happiness.

'Ever a great lover of Natural Philosophie', Boevey thus wrote at length about how the body, and in particular the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain, influenced a man's nature.<sup>72</sup> Subscribing to humoral theory, he believed that the body shaped behaviour and was also a book from which man's intentions and character could be read. Physiognomy thus enabled us 'to know the mind w[hi]ch is invisible by ye body which is visible'.<sup>73</sup> But, revealing as it was, physiognomy only uncovered natural inclinations rather than deliberate deceptions. Boevey's 'grand object' was to uncover the deceitful hypocrite who could be encouraged to 'unbutton' himself and have his 'veil' lifted when his speech, countenance or face gave him away. Another means of determining a man's nature was thus to examine his gestures, dress, deportment, mannerisms and behaviour. Self-interest also betrayed a man: 'we must interprete ye words & deeds of such an old dissembling Foxe not by liberal Meaning of his Words & deeds but only by his profit'.<sup>74</sup> Passion was nevertheless the surest indicator: 'The Natural Marke of ye Passion bursting out is a truer testimony of a mans mind than his owne word is purposely spoken'.<sup>75</sup> Of course, emotions might be mixed, so the observer had to be careful not to muddle the 'intermingled signe' with one produced by a single passion. Boevey therefore urged his reader to practice his efforts at understanding the psychology of the emotions: 'this our Art of discovering ye hidden man by perusing of ye outward man, depends more upon Use & Practise, than reading of Books'.<sup>76</sup> Once perfected,

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 51

<sup>72</sup> *Brief Lives*, ed. Clark, 113.

<sup>73</sup> Wellcome Library, London MS 699, 'Of Discerning of Men', tabs 15, 37. For a discussion of the context see Porter, *Windows of the Soul*.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, tabs 77-80

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, tab 84

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, tab 104

these skills would give a double advantage over others, allowing a man to 'keep his own Designes covered But discover the ways of his Adversarys. Hee that can doe the one, and best guess att the other is the next step to a Conqueror, but he that failes in both must either ascribe his overthrow to his own folly or his victory to the hand of fortune'.<sup>77</sup> Active philosophy taught the ability to dissemble oneself and, simultaneously, to see through the dissembling of others.

### Placing Boevey's philosophy

Boevey's trials and tribulations as a merchant embroiled in law, as a traveller, as a citizen of the world, as a landowner locked in dispute with his neighbours, as a royalist agent in a time of war, all provided experiences on which he drew. His thoughts were systematised into a coherent and intersecting philosophy that he believed would help men negotiate life, even get one over others, but they also reconciled self-advancement with a rational morality that could ensure order, security, prosperity, virtue and responsibility. Boevey's ideas satisfied the need of a mercantile community that was seeking to advance personal as well as national prosperity. Indeed, merchants needed to be able to practice dissimulations, tricks and deceptions as much as any princes or courtier, who were the usual targets of such philosophising. For Boevey, philosophy was not an abstract past-time pursued solely in courts, universities, societies, in the gentleman's library or even in a republic of letters, but rather something that should be explored in everyday life, by everyone.<sup>78</sup>

How far was all this, to use Aubrey's phrase, 'a thing not donne before'? For all his emphasis on philosophy learned from experience and his rejection of bookish ideas, Boevey was influenced by a pan-European culture: he spoke five languages, had travelled extensively in

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<sup>77</sup> Northwestern University Archives, 'Of Serviency', sub-heading 'Suspicion', 123.

<sup>78</sup> We lack some of his treatises that might have touched most on matters of state; even so, statecraft is not treated in the treatises as a separate realm.

Europe, applied Machiavelli to English affairs at the beginning of the civil wars,<sup>79</sup> and temporarily moved to Middleburg to pursue his legal battle. Across Europe in the early and mid seventeenth-century theoreticians urged kings and ministers to penetrate, guard against and profit from the dissimulations practiced by others.<sup>80</sup> Perhaps the work that comes closest to Boevey's was Marin Cureau de la Chambre's *The art how to know men*, translated into English in 1665 when we know Boevey was writing some of his own treatises.<sup>81</sup> 'What we undertake is THE ART HOW TO KNOW MEN', de la Chambre's translator claimed, 'an Art whereby every man is taught to know *himself*, wherein consists the highest point of *Wisdom*; and withall to know *others*, which is the Master-piece of *Prudence*.' Like Boevey's own work, it was intended as 'the surest guide [that] can be taken for a man's conduct in civil life'. It, too, made use of physiognomy but, like his, 'goes much

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<sup>79</sup> Raab rightly ascribes *The Atheisticall Politition or a Briefe Discourse concerning Ni. Machiavell* (1642). Boevey's defence of Machiavelli, anti-clericalism, knowledge of Italian and travels there make him a possible candidate for being the 'JB' who translated Machiavelli's *Works* into English in 1675. I hope to discuss Boevey's Machiavellianism elsewhere.

<sup>80</sup> Jean-Pierre Cavaillé, *Dis/simulations. Jules-César Vanini, François La Mothe Le Vayer, Gabriel Naudé, Louis Machon et Torquato Accetto: Religion, Morale et politique au XVIIe siècle* (Paris, 2002); Jon Snyder, *Dissimulation and the Culture of Secrecy in Early Modern Europe* (Los Angeles, 2009); April Shelford, 'François de La Mothe Le Vayer and the Defence of Pagan Virtue,' *The Seventeenth Century* xv (2000), 67-89; K.T Butler, 'Louis Machon's "Apologie Pour Machiavelle": 1643 and 1668', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* iii (1940), 208-227; Peter Donaldson, *Machiavelli and Mystery of State* (Cambridge, 1992). I am grateful to Jon Parkin for a discussion about European ideas. For a later seventeenth century crisis of trust see Knights, *Representation and Misrepresentation in Later Stuart Britain. Partisanship and Political Culture* (Oxford, 2005); Rachel Weil, *A Plague of Informers. Conspiracy and Political Trust in William III's England* (New Haven, 2013).

<sup>81</sup> De la Chambre published four volumes, 1659-1666, of *L'Art de Connaître les Hommes*, as well as five volumes 1640-1662 called *Caractères des passions*.

further, since it promises to shew, what were, or will be, the inclinations and passions, past and to come, the strength and weakness of mens minds, the dispositions they have to certain Arts and Sciences, the Habits they have acquir'd: and what is most important, it teaches the way, to discover secret designs, private actions, and the unknown Authors of known actions'.<sup>82</sup>

The works of seventeenth century 'reason of state' writers, such as de La Mothe Le Vayer, Machon, 'Mazarin', De la Chambre, Della Casa, and Gracián y Morales suggest that Boevey was part of mainstream European culture and that he brought the insights fostered amongst practitioners of statecraft in Europe to England, stripping them of their catholic and absolutist frameworks, and extending them to the everyday world beyond the court.<sup>83</sup> Boevey thus synthesised 'reason of state' ideology, which had been applied to the machinations of princes and courts, and applied it to the personal and the civil, tending to see the political in almost every aspect of the human condition. The calculation and prudence which reason of state recommended at the national level was to be emulated by the individual. Boevey's was a more explicit 'how-to' guide than the continental works, designed for everyone. Noah Millstone has suggested that a distrustful and conspiratorially-minded 'politic gaze' shaped the era's way of seeing politics; Boevey's writings would suggest that the politic gaze was expanded to embrace almost every aspect of social relations.<sup>84</sup>

The broadening of advice literature beyond the court gathered momentum in the later Stuart period.<sup>85</sup> Had Boevey published his work, it might have been very successful. In 1680

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<sup>82</sup> De la Chambre, *The Art How to Know Men* (1665), translated by John Davies, dedication.

<sup>83</sup> Della Casa was nevertheless the only one of these authors cited by Boevey.

<sup>84</sup> Noah Millstone, 'Seeing like a Statesman in Early Stuart England', *Past & Present*, CCXXIII (2014), 77 -127

<sup>85</sup> Anna Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility: Changing Codes of Conduct in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1998); Helen Berry, *Gender, Society and Print Culture in late-Stuart England: The Cultural World of the Athenian Mercury* (Aldershot, 2003); Laurence Klein, 'Making Philosophy Worldly in the London Periodical about 1700', in Joseph Marino and

a publication called *Humane prudence, or, The art by which a man may raise himself and fortune to grandeur* treated some similar topics to Boevey and shares some (though certainly not all) of his outlook;<sup>86</sup> and it was hugely successful, running to six editions before 1700. 'Adapted to the Genius of the Citizens, and Designed for the Use of Schools in the United States', it was revised and republished as late as 1806;<sup>87</sup> and further revised in 1897 as a Victorian self-help manual.<sup>88</sup> Boevey's work also in some ways prefigures the periodicals of the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries that offered moral, philosophical and practical advice to their readers. *The Spectator* famously sought to bring philosophy out of the colleges and down to the tea table, while the *Athenian Gazette* supplied an array of advice and guidance and Houghton published intelligence and commentary about economic affairs. None of these was as systematic as Boevey's interlocking treatises, but they were part of a similar desire to make philosophy and knowledge useful and applicable to everyday civil life.

Yet most of this advice literature was religiously orthodox. Boevey's deism marks him out as different. It is true that his thought evolved over time. The works of the 1660s still appear to have remnants of Christian orthodoxy. Thus 'The Art of Moderating Greife', written in 1666, does invoke the Christian framework outlined in Alex Walsham's chapter that placed suffering as a source of spiritual sustenance. 'Outward publique evils' were, he said then, the result of divine providence that had to be accepted and he noted that 'Our religion hath

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Melinda Schlitt (eds.), *Perspectives on Early Modern and Modern Intellectual History* (Rochester, NY, 2001), 401-418

<sup>86</sup> The tract was published anonymously by 'A.B' but the 5<sup>th</sup> edition has a new dedicatory epistle signed 'William de Britaine'. This may have been the pseudonym of the professional translator John Davies of Kidwelly, who had translated *De la Chambre* and, intriguingly, met Aubrey on at least one occasion in 1670 [A. Clark, *The Life and Times of Anthony Wood, Antiquary, of Oxford, 1632-1695* (2 vols, Oxford, 1892), ii. 19.

<sup>87</sup> Herman Mann (ed.), *Human Prudence, Or, The Art by which a Man and a Woman May be Advanced to Fortune, to Permanent Honor, and to Real Grandeur* (Boston, 1806)

<sup>88</sup> Herbert Heaton Sturmer (ed.) *The Counsels of William de Britaine. (A Rewriting of the Eleventh Edition of 'Humane Prudence')*, (1897)



made a covenant of sufferings and the great business of our lives lyes in suffereings'.<sup>89</sup> Yet even at that point he urged his reader either to 'submit to the impositions of God and your portion of sufferings' or 'renounce y[ou]r Religion'. By the early 1690s, perhaps much earlier, he had chosen to do the latter, embracing a providential deism. This he appears to have found compatible with stoicism and a prudential negotiation of the machinations of human adversaries. Whilst his belief in a God appears to have remained strong,<sup>90</sup> and his God acted providentially, the de-Christianisation of his philosophy may have placed even more stress on the importance of active philosophy as a guide for how individuals could find their own way through life's tribulations. His deism may also provide a partial explanation for why he did not publish his works: deism in England flourished after the lapse of the licensing act in 1695, shortly before Boevey's death. Nor did his philosophy neatly fit the 'radical Enlightenment' of the followers of Spinoza, charted by Jonathan Israel, or, for all their shared hatred of priestcraft, the republicanism of John Toland that has been explored by Justin Champion.<sup>91</sup> Boevey was not, so far as we know, part of either of these intellectual circles.

Boevey's failure to publish may, in addition to the factors already considered, also have been because he was aware of a tension between his life, which nourished his philosophy, and the ideas that he advocated. Boevey never resolved the Courten legacy in his favour; failed to persuade England into a fourth Dutch war; lost money as a result of both his royalist activity and imprisonment; and his wins over the Exmoor farmers were both limited and relatively paltry for the amount of effort expended and discontent stirred. Boevey's son

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<sup>89</sup> Clark Library MS 1960.006, vol. 1, 69.

<sup>90</sup> Boevey fits much (though not all) of the profile explored in Joseph Waligore, 'The Piety of the English Deists: Their Personal Relationship with an Active God', *Intellectual History Review*, xxii (2012), 181-197. For a useful discussion of English deism see Wayne Hudson, *The English Deists. Studies in Early Enlightenment* (2009), though Boevey is not included in it.

<sup>91</sup> Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* (Oxford, 2001); Justin Champion, *Republican Learning: John Toland and the Crisis of Christian Culture, 1696-1722* (Manchester, 2003).

William, who had presumably been schooled in Active Philosophy, clearly failed to curb his own passions as he was exhorted to do, instead displaying 'a certain moroseness of temper'.<sup>92</sup> William's famously beautiful wife and eventual heir of Flaxley, Catherine, was 'as learned as the best philosopher in Europe' but she rejected her father-in-law's deism and ensured that the family name was, ironically, associated with 'strictly orthodox' Christian piety and philanthropy.<sup>93</sup> If active philosophy was about shaping behaviour, prudence and successful negotiation,<sup>94</sup> it has to be admitted that its author and those around him fell short of its precepts. Whether it made the litigious, restless and prickly Boevey happy, I leave the reader to judge.

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<sup>92</sup> Crawley-Boevey, *Perverse Widow*, 74. His memorial inscription nevertheless suggests that 'the greater part of his life was happily spent' [ibid, 75].

<sup>93</sup> She was almost certainly the 'perverse widow' of *The Spectator* [no.113, 10 July 1711]. For her life see Crawley-Boevey, *Perverse Widow*, 63-139.

<sup>94</sup> Clark also referred to Active Philosophy as 'Negotiative Philosophy' [*Brief Lives* (ed.), Clark, 112].